

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2002

Hon. Ann M. Veneman
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
14th & Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:


We are writing to raise concerns about the proposed planning regulations under the National Forest Management Act released on November 26, 2002. We are especially concerned that, unlike during the development of previous regulations, in this case the Forest Service did not ask a group of independent scientists to inform or review the proposed regulations. Therefore, we are writing to urge you to ask the National Academy of Sciences or another independent scientific body to review the proposed regulations before they are made final.

Several elements of the proposed rule have raised particular concern in the scientific and environmental communities because they appear to loosen requirements that ensure that forest plans are based on sound science. It is especially important that these elements be reviewed. For example, the proposed rule de-emphasizes the importance of ecological sustainability and seems to weaken the requirement that plans ensure the maintenance of ecosystem health and species viability. The rule makes the establishment of science advisory boards optional, so that there is no established independent mechanism to review the use of science in forest plans. Also, under the proposal, monitoring is less likely to occur because the proposal does not require that a project set aside funds for monitoring before going forward. Monitoring is critical to the Forest Service's stated goal of adaptive management.

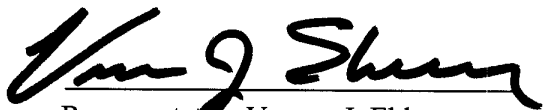
Additionally, the proposal exempts forest plans from undergoing environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Forest plans lay the framework for decisions on how land will be used and resources allocated in the future and thus have enormous environmental implications that may not be adequately assessed under this proposal. Finally, we are also concerned that forest plans would be less effective (regardless of their quality) because the proposal would allow plans to be amended to exempt any specific project from the standards in the plan.

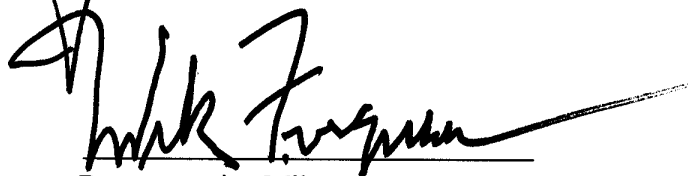
National forests are important national assets of concern to citizens throughout the United States. It is critical that we manage these lands in a sustainable way to the benefit of all, and science underlies good decision-making in forest management. We look forward to working with you to ensure that science continues to play an appropriate role in forest planning.

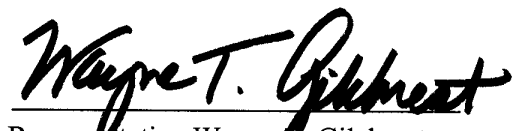
Sincerely,

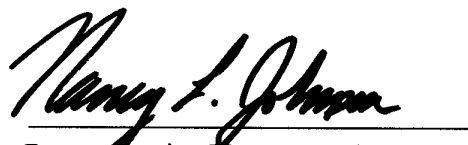

Representative Sherwood Boehlert


Representative James C. Greenwood


Representative Vernon J. Ehlers



Representative Mike Ferguson

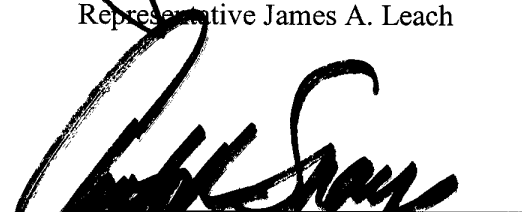

Representative Wayne T. Gilchrest

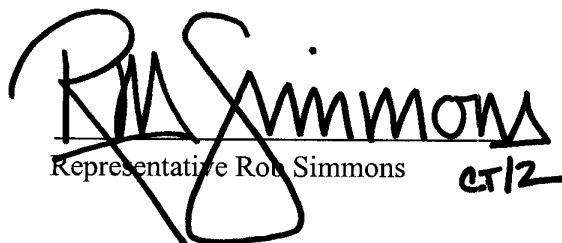

Representative Nancy L. Johnson


Representative Mark Steven Kirk


Representative James A. Leach


Representative Jim Ramstad


Representative Christopher Shays


Representative Rob Simmons CT/2

Cc: President George W. Bush